

NSC BRIEFING

13 September 1958

TAIWAN

- I. We have just received word that the Chinese Communists used aircraft and PT boats in two interdiction action this morning.
- A. According to fragmentary advance reports, the first action took place near Tungting island (a small lighthouse rock about 15 miles south of Chinmen and 7-8 miles from the nearest mainland point). A Nationalist convoy enroute there was fired on by coast artillery which hit and disabled one escort subchaser. The convoy reported that it was under attack by Communist PT boats and the subchaser is said to have requested US Navy assistance. At last report, the Nationalists had dispatched aircraft to the scene, some of them armed with bombs.
- B. The initial report on this action also said that a Communist MIG fighter had strafed a Nationalist ship in another convoy two to three miles south of Chinmen. This would be the first time the Communists have used aircraft for interdiction.
- C. Without the full story, it is difficult to say what the Communists are up to.
1. One possibility is that they want to emphasize their strength and aggressiveness as the second session of talks gets underway in Warsaw.
- D. The Peiping government has publicly rejected any idea of a negotiated cease fire.

NSA, NAVY reviews completed

1. This morning's Peiping Peoples Daily states: "There is no question of 'ceasefire' since China and the United States are not at war." The US authorities know that our troops at the Amoy-Quemoy front have blockaded Quemoy with heavy artillery fire and that the Chiang Kai-shek troops there are faced with the danger of exhausting their supplies of food and ammunition. The Americans are therefore seeking a so-called ceasefire to stave off our attack in order to reinforce the Chiang Kai-shek troops, afford them a breathing spell, and obstruct our liberation of the offshore islands."
 2. This article, which appears to have been written by one of the top-level Chinese Communist leaders, also says that when the situation "may at any moment explode into a war between the United States and China, it is most urgent that the United States stop its deployment in the Taiwan Straits area and discontinue its military threats and war provocations against China."
- II. It is also possible that the Chinese Communists have attacked these convoys in the belief that new Nationalist methods have succeeded in breaking the Communist artillery blockade of Chinmea.)
- A. ~~In fact,~~ however, their interdiction is still quite effective.
 1. Altogether since 23 August only 820 tons have been landed.
 2. The Chinese Nationalists' estimate of daily requirements of supplies of all categories is about 700 tons; we estimate that their minimum requirement is 300 tons a day.

B. The Chinmen garrison's position will become critical in less than a month if the blockade is not broken. Chiang Kai-shek told Admiral Smoot on 12 September that if the US-Nationalist capability to land supplies did not show marked improvement in five days, "drastic steps would have to be taken."

1. In these circumstances, there is danger that the Chinese Nationalists will initiate action against the Communists as a desperation measure. There is the further danger that they may take steps designed to provoke hostilities between the US and Communist China.

2. Chiang Kai-shek still asserts, however, that he will live up to his commitment not to attack the mainland without prior consultation with the US.

III. Soviet public support of Peiping continues. Khrushchev's warning that "an attack on the Chinese People's Republic--is an attack on the Soviet Union" has been stressed by Soviet propaganda.

- IV. The US Intelligence Board completed its estimate of Sino-Soviet intentions with respect to Taiwan two days ago. We concluded that:**
- A. The Chinese Communists will very probably maintain their interdiction of Chinmen while the talks are under way.**
 - B. In maintaining the interdiction it is likely that the Chinese Communists are willing to take actions involving considerable risk of major armed conflict with the US.**
 - 1. If US ships move close inshore in the course of escorting Nationalist supply convoys, the Communists will probably not desist from their artillery barrages against unloading operations.**
 - 2. If the US attempts to prevent by force the interdiction of supply, US forces so engaged will almost certainly be attacked within the limits of Chinese Communist capabilities.**
 - 3. If the US were to announce that it would resupply Chinmen with all-American convoys (supported by appropriate combat strength ready to defend against attack) we believe that the Chinese Communists would probably attack the US force, although there is a chance that they would not.**
 - C. In addition to the continued interdiction of Chinmen, the Chinese Communists might seize, with little or no warning, one or more of the smaller offshore islands.**

D. We do not believe, however, that they would deliberately challenge the US militarily by assaulting any of the major offshore islands in the near future. They probably believe the islands will fall or be ceded to them in any case.

V. Turning now to the Soviet side, the Intelligence Board estimated that the Soviet public commitment to support the Chinese Communists--while intended to deter the US--was almost certainly made on the basis of calculations that activities in the Taiwan area would fall short of provoking US intervention on such a scale as to call for overt Soviet military participation.

- A. We believe that the Soviet leaders have concurred in Chinese Communist actions in the Strait area.
- B. Their principal objectives are political--to discredit the US, to comply with the wishes of their Chinese ally, and to enhance the power and prestige of the Bloc.
- C. They also believe that if the US backs down from its position or acts in defiance of world opinion, they will have inflicted a serious political defeat on the US.

VI. We believe that while the Soviets probably do not wish to see the scale of hostilities expanded and the risk of their involvement magnified, they will be aware that the US may be led by Chinese Communist actions to engage Chinese Communist forces.

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[REDACTED] a scale of increasing damage and danger to the Chinese regime, the Soviets might directly attack US forces engaged in China, including the bases from which such forces were operating, in the face of the attendant risk of general war.

VII. To summarize our view of the situation, I would say this: Regardless of their calculations, the Soviets have permitted Communist China to set in motion a train of events which neither of them can bring under control without retreating from its present position. At the same time the Soviet Union has given Communist China what appears to be an unequivocal promise of military support.

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